

Home Remedies



Using very hot water is somewhat effective for individual mounds. On a cool sunny morning when RIFA are close to the surface, use approximately 3 gallons of very hot water and pour onto the mound. This method is effective 60% of the time. The problem with this technique is that hot water will damage plants and grass. Be very careful not to burn yourself.

Soaking a mound with soap solutions, cleaning products or soaked wood ashes is believed to remove the protective oil coating from the ants, ultimately killing the ants. These methods have yet to be determined if they are effective.



Home remedies such as MaltOMeal® or other instant grits are not effective when placed on the mound. The ant colony just moves to another location. The theory behind ants eating grits is that their stomachs will swell and rupture. This is not effective because only the last stage of the developing RIFA is known to eat solid food. All other life stages feed on liquids or greasy materials.

DO NOT use gasoline or any other petroleum products! Not only is it flammable and dangerous to handle, it will leave residue in the soil and may run off into ground or surface water, causing a serious pollution problem.



Questions and Answers

Will Red Imported Fire Ants kill trees?

RIFA may use trees as a nesting place. Ants in mounds at the base of the trunk are probably not causing any damage to well established trees. The ants may actually be keeping away other insects that may be harmful to the tree.



Why can't we get rid of Red Imported Fire Ants completely?

The biology of the RIFA makes their spread economically and technically impossible to get rid of from large areas. However, by using proper control methods, they can be eliminated temporarily from small areas.

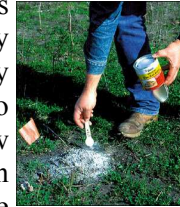
What is the best product to use?

There are over a hundred products labeled for use on Fire Ants and Ants in general. These products contain approximately a dozen common active ingredients. Compare the active ingredients, concentrations and price. In general, most of the products are effective and pose minimal risk when applied as directed. Buy products intended for your use, such as for indoor use or applications around food bearing plants; read the product label carefully and follow the instructions.



Do baits really work?

Baits must be used properly to be effective. It is critical to put the bait out at the correct time of day and at the correct rate. The ants must be actively moving in order to pick up the bait. The best time to apply bait is generally mid-morning after the dew has evaporated, or late afternoon on hot days when the air begins to cool. If the bait is applied late in the year, it may take several months to provide maximum control. Bait will suppress ant colonies for a year or more.



What is the safest product to use around children and pets?

Baits have a very low toxicity. If you scatter bait thinly in grass, it falls down in the grass where few things other than ants can encounter it.

Regardless of what product you use, always follow the instructions and keep animals and children away from treated areas as directed.

Can I afford to treat for Red Imported Fire Ants?

The average cost for a pound of bait is less than \$10.00. If you were to treat a ¼ acre lot most bait products would require you to use less than ½ pound of bait.



What should you do if you get stung by a Red Imported Fire Ant?



Ask your pharmacist for an over the counter ointment that can be used to reduce itching. Keep the area clean to avoid infections. Watch for excessive swelling, itching or redness. If you experience shortness of breath, thickening of the tongue, or sweating, you may be having an allergic reaction and should seek emergency medical care immediately; call 911.

CONTROLLING RED IMPORTED FIRE ANTS IN AN URBAN SETTING



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What are Red Imported Fire Ants?

Red Imported Fire Ants (RIFA) are very aggressive and their stings are quite painful.

How do you identify a Red Imported Fire Ant?

RIFA vary in size from one-sixteenth to one-fourth inch long, and are reddish-brown in color. Native Fire Ants look almost identical to RIFA and you can not distinguish them from other ants just by looking at them.



Looking at the ant mound can help in identifying the ants. RIFA mounds have more than one central opening into the colony. An extensive tunneling system is present, with crumbly soil piled up. RIFA build their mounds in soil as well as rotting logs, around tree stumps and the base of trees.

History

RIFA are originally from South America. It is believed they entered the United States in the 1930’s aboard cargo ships that docked in Mobile, Alabama. Since this time, the ant has slowly spread and in 1998 RIFA were discovered in California.



RIFA can easily be transported in nursery stock and soil. To help combat RIFA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture developed a quarantine program for this pest. The quarantine limits the movement of articles including plants, and soil. There are also requirements for commercial nursery growers to take steps to ensure their products are free of RIFA.

Where are Red Imported Fire Ants Found?



RIFA may be found nesting under patio slabs, in lawns, compost piles, mulched flower beds, vegetable gardens, cracks in pavement, under the sidewalk, building foundations, concrete driveways, and electrical boxes. They may also be found near ponds, drainage ditches, streams and rivers because they require water to survive. After a heavy rain, the colony may move to higher ground or inside homes to get away from the saturated soil. In hot, dry summer months, they may also be found indoors because they are looking for food and moisture. Once indoors, entire colonies may nest in walls or rafters.

Why is the Red Imported Fire Ant a Nuisance?

RIFA can be a nuisance to people as well as harm pets and wildlife. RIFA attack when their nests are disturbed. Hundreds of ants come out of the mound and aggressively swarm over a victim and sting repeatedly. This occurs when a person or animal steps on the mound. The ants are attracted to vibration or movement and tend to sting when objects are moving. A sting feels like a poke with a hot needle, causing quite a bit of pain. Furthermore, each ant can sting numerous times. Each sting will hurt for approximately one hour and will form a blister-like sore. Often times the blisters become infected and may leave permanent scars.

About half of those stung by RIFA may develop swelling, itching, redness and pain. These symptoms may last for several days. While rare, RIFA venom can be life-threatening to people who experience an allergic reaction. These symptoms include: severe swelling, shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea, headaches and profuse sweating.



RIFA can also cause structural damage because the ants move dirt from underneath foundations, patio slabs or concrete walkways; the nest cavity may cause the concrete to fall. Colonies in these sites may be difficult to locate and get rid of.

Management Options

Unfortunately the RIFA is probably here to stay. While it may not be possible to totally get rid of the RIFA, you can successfully control the ants within a limited area. With relatively little cost and effort, you can prevent or manage most of the problems they cause using the following approved methods:

Lawns and other Ornamental Turf

Using a broadcast bait treatment once or twice a year may provide sufficient control. A “Two-Step” method can also be used. The first step involves the application of a bait product intended to kill the queen. After waiting several days, you then treat mounds with a faster acting product intended for mound treatment. These products come in the form of dust, granules, liquid, or aerosol. If you are patient, you can wait for the bait treatment to work without treating the individual mounds; however, nuisance mounds should be treated as needed. In large areas individual mound treatment may not be feasible.



Homes and Buildings

If you can determine where the ant colony is located, treat them with a contact insecticide that is labeled for indoor use. If the ants are not an immediate threat, bait labeled for indoor use can also be used.



If you can see where the outdoor ant colonies are entering from, treat the individual mounds near the building using a contact insecticide with a long residual effect. Applying an insecticide around the base of the building is also helpful in keeping new ant colonies from establishing. Caulking cracks may also help in preventing ants from entering.

Home Gardens

RIFA will occasionally be found in gardens, especially during hot, dry weather. Only a few products have been registered for treating ants in vegetable gardens. Some products can be applied before planting and provide temporary control. Read product labels carefully to determine if the product can be used around food plants. Preventing the ants from entering a garden may be the best management practice. Products registered for controlling ants in turf grass can be applied outside the perimeter of the garden. Treating individual mounds near the garden can also be helpful in preventing ants from invading your garden.



Compost Piles, Flower Beds, Pavement

RIFA will invade compost piles and mulched flower beds looking for warmth and moisture. It may be difficult to locate the colony. If the exact location can not be determined, treat the area with the greatest ant activity using a fast-acting bait product.

Around Bodies of Water

RIFA are often found near water, such as creeks, streams, rivers, ponds, and lakes because they require water to survive. Bait products can be applied close to the shoreline, but not directly to the water. Individual mound treatments should be made very carefully, using products that have a low toxicity to fish. To decrease the risk of runoff and contaminating the water, do not bait or treat mounds if rain is likely to occur soon after treatment. Every effort must be made to avoid contaminating water with pesticides. Remember to read the product label carefully.

